DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 507 CG 021 153

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TITLE Secretarial Personality: The Ideal According to Holland and Bem Profiles.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (68th, Burlingame, CA, April 28-May 1, 1988). Portions contain faint or weak type.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Employees; *Employer Attitudes; Personality Assessment; *Personality Traits; *Personnel Directors; *Profiles; *Secretaries; Sex Role
IDENTIFIERS *Bem Sex Role Inventory; *Hollands Hexagonal Model

ABSTRACT

Personnel directors (N=34) responded to a mailed adjective checklist describing the ideal secretary. This list contained eight adjectives cxorresponding to each of Holland's six vocationally-related personality traits (Realistic, Social, Investigative, Enterprising, Conventional, and Artistic) and eight feminine and eight masculine adjectives from the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The results revealed that the personnel directors preferred a Holland profile high in the Conventional and Social areas and low in the Artistic area (p .001), but had also selected more masculine than feminine items (p .01). The most frequently checked adjectives were practical, tactful, friendly, confident, self-controlled, efficient, stable, orderly, detailed, helpful, responsible, energetic, self-reliant, conscientious, cheerful, cooperative, precise, and honest. The least frequently checked adjectives were shy, introverted, impractical, complicated, popular, compassionate, risk-taker, emotional, non-conforming, pleasure-seeking, sympathetic, humble, materialistic, cautious, domineering, obedient, gentle, adventurous, convincing, and disorderly. (Author/NB)

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SECRETARIAL PERSONALITY: THE IDEAL ACCORDING TO HOLLAND AND BEM PROFILES

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ABSTRACT:

Personnel directors (N = 34) responded to a mailed adjective checklist describing the ideal secretary. The list contained eight adjectives corresponding to each of John Holland's six vocationally-related personality traits (R,I,A,S,E,C), and eight "feminine" and eight "masculine" adjectives from Bem. Results indicated that the personnel directors preferred a High C, high S, low A Holland profile ($p < .001$), but had also selected more masculine than feminine items ($p < .01$). An analysis of the individual items helped to explain the latter finding.

INTRODUCTION:

Holland's (1965) hexagonal model of vocationally related personality traits contends that office positions, be high on the C factor. For the past half century, the position of secretary has been associated with women, and the term "pink collar workers" has come to describe dead-end clerical jobs with no upward mobility. Therefore, the two hypotheses guiding this research were that

1) The ideal secretary would be described in terms associated with a high C Holland code.

2) The ideal secretary would be described in terms associated with feminity.

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METHOD:

In the spring of 1987, a hundred personnel directors of electronics firms headquartered in Silicon Valley received a mail in survey, comprised of a 56 item adjective checklist: eight adjectives related to each of Holland's six factors, and six were "masculine," six were "feminine" items from the BSRI (Bem, 1974). (Two masculine and two feminine items were counted doubly, as representing both a given Holland trait as well as masculinity-femininity.

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RESULTS:

Thirty-four returns were received within the next three months. The average personnel director had.circled 43% of the available adjectives. The most frequently checked adjectives were practical, tactful, friendly, confident, self-controlled, efficient, stable, orderly, detailed, helpful, responsible, energetic, self-reliant, conscientious, cheerful, cooperative, precise, and honest. The least frequently checked adjectives were shy, introverted, impractical, complicated, popular, compassionate, risk-taker, emotional, non-conforming, pleasure-seeking, sympathetic, humble, materialistic, cautious, domineering, obedient (!?!), gentle, adventurous, convincing, and disorderly.

The mean number of adjectives circled for each Holland code:

R = 3.15	I = 2.91	A = 0.97
S = 5.15	E = 2.56	C = 5.71

These data were statistically significant, according to Friedman's rank test for repeated measures (chi square = 108.60, df = 5, $p < .001$), thus confirming Holland's claim that secretarial work requires a high C, high S personality.

Surprisingly, the average number of "feminine" adjectives checked was only 1.79, while the average number of "masculine" items checked was 2.94. (Friedman's rank test for repeated measures yielded a chi square of 7.53, df = 1, $p < .01$). This unexpected finding becomes comprehensible upon an item analysis. While almost all the personnel directors did circle the "feminine" trait cheerful, only half circled the "feminine" trait of understanding, and viritually no one circled gentle, sympathetic, compassionate, or shy. Regarding the "masculine" traits: the majority of the respondents circled self-reliant, about half circled ambitious, independent, assertive, and analytical, and virtually no one circled risk-taker.

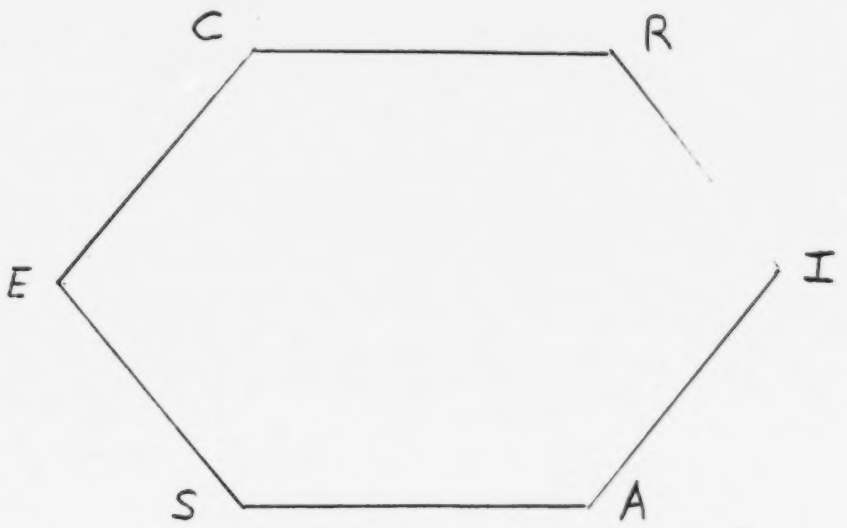
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION:

It must be kept in mind that the personnel directors responded to a hypothetical or theoretical situation, in which they were called to describe the "ideal" secretary, and this approach may not yield the same results as a concurrent or predictive validation using real secretaries as the subjects, or an experiment about whether or not personnel directors really do tend to hire obedient job applicants for secretaries. Let us hope that the advance of office technology and humanistic theories of management bring about a trend in industry to want a more self-reliant, autonomous employee in secretarial positions, so that the plight of the pink collars may become history.

HOLLAND'S VOCATIONAL TRAIT MODEL

interpreted by T.L. Brink, Ph.D., M.B.A.

In order to understand Holland's theory, imagine a six-sided box. In each of the six corners there is a given personality trait that is vocationally linked. In each person, some of these traits will be more pronounced than others, predisposing that individual to be more compatible with certain occupations instead of others.



CONVENTIONAL (C) people like to carry out details and follow through on instructions. These folk enjoy order, certainty, security. They make good accountants, office workers, civil servants, and military. They can put up with an assembly line. Most large organizations have a hard time assimilating people who do not have at least a moderate C trait.

ARTISTIC (A) people can be found in the corner 180 degrees away from the C people described above. A great source of confusion comes when we confuse the ARTISTIC personality with artistic ability or even artistic interests. A person with artistic ability can paint, sculpt, sing, tapdance, or write. A person with artistic interest may enjoy tapdancing, or going to an art gallery, or listening to music on the radio. A person who is high on the ARTISTIC personality factor is someone who would be best working in the loose, unstructured atmosphere in which creativity thrives. Now notice, not every tapdancing, stained glass enthusiast who likes to play Bach on the stereo necessarily has this A personality factor. Not all high A jobs involve the fine or performing arts. Writers, broadcasters, philosophers, advertisers, and professors necessarily work in high A environments. So do commercial artists, musicians, actors, directors, photographers, architects, fashion models, and designers.

REALISTIC (R) is another term which may connote something that it should not. These people are not necesarily more level-headed or less likely to experience schizophrenic hallucinations. Just think of high R people as people who like to work with things. High R jobs are those which are mechanical, athletic, outdoors, or protective; anything hands-on, including most forms of engineering.

SOCIAL (S) types would be found in the corner 180 degrees from the R types, and right next to the A types. High S people like to work with people in a helping relationship. High S jobs would include teaching, childcare, health care, and personal service. There would be high S components in sales, management and most office work. High S people become extremely unhappy in environments in which there are few opportunities for mutually fulfilling interpersonal contact.

INVESTIGATIVE (I) types can be found between the R and A types. These people like working with data and ideas: observing, analyzing, evaluating. Anything that involves the sciences, natural or social, pure or applied has a high I component: e.g, medicine, computer programming.

ENTERPRISING (E) types are found in the corner 180 degrees from the I types, and next to the C's and S's. Unlike the I's, the E's would rather do something about a problem than study it. Like the C's, the E's are interested in organizations and rules, but the E's are the ones who establish the organization's rules while the C's obey. Like the S's, the E's are people-oriented, but the E's goal is not so muich to help people as to manipulate them in the service of organizational goals. These shakers and movers do well as entrepreneurs, managers, lawyers, politicians, and in sales.

Getting your Holland Code is one of the best ways to figure out in which types of employment your kind of personality will find fulfillment. The test manual for the SDS suggests that you look at your three highest traits, and then find the corresponding occupations which fit that code. I don't think that the SDS (or even the adjective checklist which you have just taken) is so precise so as to determine exactly the one job best for you. Remember, just as scissors need two blades in order to cut paper, so a wise employment decision requires two opposite factors: personality and abilities, and the Holland Code refers to personality. The best way to use the Holland Code (or knowledge of one's abilities by themselves) is as an exclusion factor. Look at where you scored low, not where you scored high. If you had a low C forget accounting, office work, or the military. Rule out teaching and social work if your S was low, going into business for yourself if your E was low, medical doctor if your I was low.

BRINK SELF-DESCRIPTION SCHEDULE

INSTRUCTIONS: Below are listed 56 adjectives. CIRCLE the words which you feel describe the way that you are, most of the time. You may circle as many or as few words that apply.

FRANK	HUMBLE	PERSISTENT	SHY
HONEST	MATERIALISTIC	STABLE	PRACTICAL
ANALYTICAL	CAUTIOUS	CURIOUS	INTELLECTUAL
PRECISE	RATIONAL	METHODICAL	INTROVERTED
DISORDERLY	EXPRESSIVE	EMOTIONAL	IMPRACTICAL
INTUITIVE	ORIGINAL	NONCONFORMING	COMPLICATED
CONVINCING	HELPFUL	KIND	TACTFUL
COOPERATIVE	RESPONSIBLE	UNDERSTANDING	FRIENDLY
ADVENTUROUS	DOMINEERING	OPTIMISTIC	POPULAR
AMBITIOUS	ENERGETIC	PLEASURE-SEEKING	CONFIDENT
CONSCIENTIOUS	DEPENDABLE	ORDERLY	SELF-CONTROLLED
CAREFUL	OBEDIENT	DETAILED	EFFICIENT
CHEERFUL	GENTLE	SYMPATHETIC	COMPASSIONATE
ASSERTIVE	SELF-RELIANT	INDEPENDENT	RISK-TAKER

This test is scored 0-100 (with 100 being the best). Notice that some items are scored positively (points given if the word is circled) while other items are scored negatively (points given if the word is not circled). All one point items are significant to at least the .05 level; all two pointers to at least the .01 level; all three pointers to at least the .001 level. Notice that many items are not scored.

FRANK	-HUMBLE(2)	PERSISTENT	-SHY(3)
+HONEST(3)	-MATERIALISTIC(3)	+STABLE(3)	+PRACTICAL(2)
ANALYTICAL	-CAUTIOUS(1)	CURIOUS	-INTELLECTUAL(1)
+PRECISE(2)	RATIONAL	METHODICAL	-INTROVERTED(3)
-DISORDERLY(3)	EXPRESSIVE	-EMOTIONAL(3)	-IMPRACTICAL(3)
+INTUITIVE(1)	ORIGINAL	-NONCONFORMING(3)	-COMPLICATED(3)
-CONVINCING(1)	+HELPFUL(3)	KIND	+TACTFUL(3)
+COOPERATIVE(3)	+RESPONSIBLE(3)	UNDERSTANDING	+FRIENDLY(3)
-ADVENTUROUS(2)	-DOMINEERING(3)	OPTIMISTIC	-POPULAR(3)
AMBITIOUS	+ENERGETIC(2)	-PLEASURE-SEEKING(3)	+CONFIDENT(2)
+CONSCIENTIOUS(3)	+DEPENDABLE(3)	+ORDERLY(3)	+SELF-CONTROLLED(2)
CAREFUL	-OBEDIENT(1)	+DETAILED(3)	+EFFICIENT(3)
+CHEERFUL(3)	-GENTLE(1)	-SYMPATHETIC(2)	-COMPASSIONATE(2)
ASSERTIVE	+SELF-RELIANT(2)	INDEPENDENT	-RISK-TAKER(2)